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Bonn spies' impact described as 'grave'

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WASHINGTON — American specialists judged yesterday that the latest spy scandal in West Germany had shattered that country's counterespionage efforts and caused lesser — but still grave — damage to NATO intelligence efforts and those of the United States.

George A. Carver Jr., a former deputy director of central intelligence, said the effect on West Germany's counterspy program would be "enormous." The consequences for intelligence-collecting are mitigated somewhat, he added, by the fragmentation built into the West German system.

Officially, the administration was silent on the unfolding scandal. But a U.S. diplomat, saying his was the prevailing view, called the damage "grave," and said that Hans Joachim Tiedge, a senior West German counterintelligence official who defected to East Germany, "is probably spilling names like a fountain."

In Bonn, the West German government, uncertain how many of its own agents were in jeopardy, was reported to be hastily withdrawing agents from the Soviet bloc. Both there and in Washington, officials said the danger to West German agents may be greater from several secretaries revealed as spies than from Mr. Tiedge.

Stansfield Turner, a former CIA director, concluded that the scandal is "not seriously injurious" to American intelligence directly, because all intelligence services keep the identities of their agents to themselves.

But the "real damage, probably very serious," he said, is to the West German counterespionage system and, by extension, to NATO.

Another former senior intelligence official took a longer view. Apart from "terrible" damage to the West German system, he said, the scandal underscores weaknesses in Western intelligence revealed by recent cases in France, Britain and the United States.

The security breakdown also has implications for efforts to combat

terrorism, he said, noting that West Germany's counterespionage agency also must constantly assess the links between terrorists and foreign governments.

The latest scandal began to unfold last week with the disappearance of Sonja Lueneburg, secretary for many years to Martin Bange-mann, economics minister and chairman of the Free Democratic Party.

It spread with the defection of Mr. Tiedge. Then other secretaries began to disappear. One in the office of President Richard von Weizsaecker was arrested. Now officials say as many as a dozen women secretaries in sensitive offices are under investigation.

Mr. Carver once was a senior American intelligence officer in West Germany. Against that background, he recalled how the West German system was reorganized after World War II in order to avoid any comparison with the Nazi intelligence network.

That concern led to the separation, in effect, of the oversight and clearance function in counterintelligence from the investigative and arrest function in the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Mr. Tiedge's organization. Mr. Tiedge's appearance in East Berlin is as if a chief of counterintelligence for the FBI had defected.

The Office for the Protection of the Constitution is sharply distinct from the Federal Intelligence Service, and there is a sharp rivalry between the two agencies.

Therefore, Mr. Carver said, Mr. Tiedge "wouldn't have had direct access to U.S. and NATO information — though people do talk to each other. But he was ideally placed to tell the East Germans which of their [agents] were suspected, to warn of raids, and to selectively approve hostile agents for sensitive jobs."

The current scandal and previous ones, Mr. Carver said, may be part of a price West Germany has paid for "deliberate inefficiency" in its intelligence services and laws requiring automatic repatriation of Germans dislocated after World War II.